

The President's Daily Brief

21 August 1972

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

21 August 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

There was sharp fighting in each of South Vietnam's four military regions over the weekend amid signs that the Communists hope to keep the war going at a heightened pace over the next several weeks. Aerial photography of Haiphong harbor shows a Chinese minesweeper and two smaller craft apparently equipped for minesweeping operations. (Page 1)

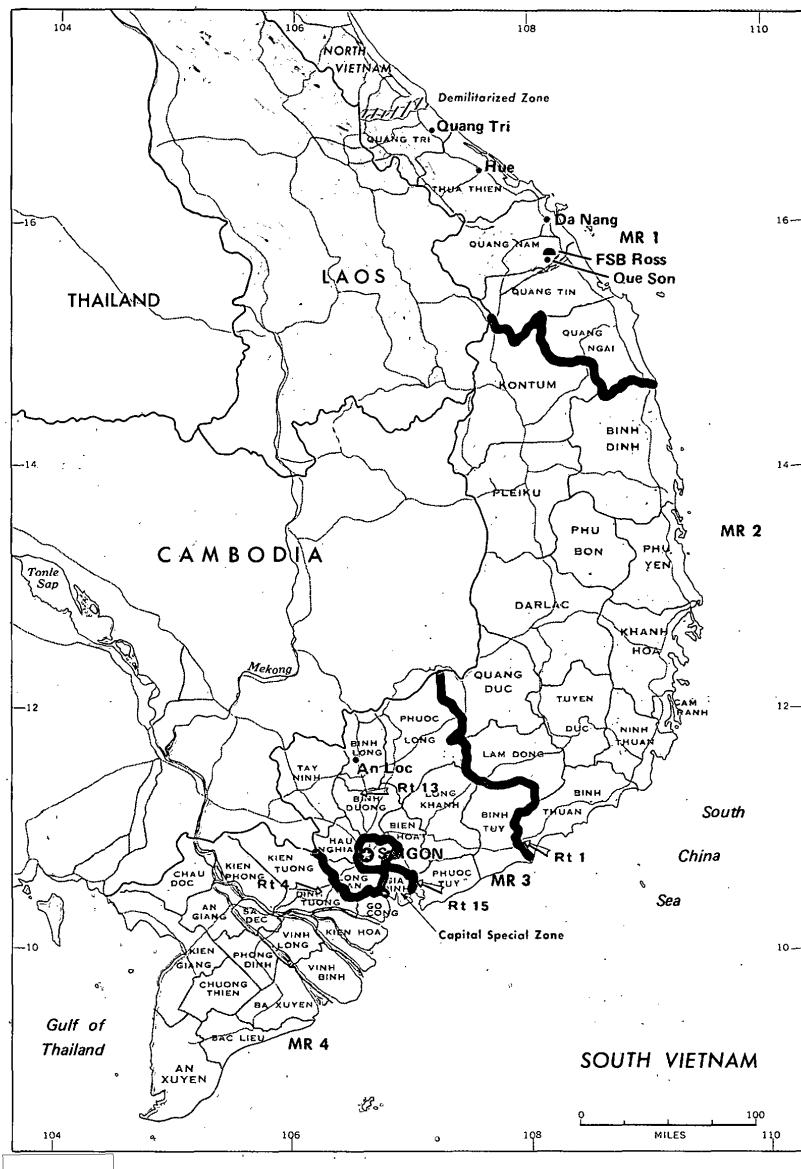
Recent satellite photography of the Ping-hsiang area on the China - North Vietnam border showed a high level of logistics activity. (Page 3)

In Laos, Vang Pao's forces are not encountering any major enemy resistance in their advance toward the Plaine des Jarres. (Page 4)

Moroccan King Hassan's address to the nation over the weekend is not likely to inspire confidence in his rule. (Page 5)

The East Germans presented a new draft treaty on basic relations with West Germany at the latest Bahr-Kohl session. (Page 6)

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VIETNAM

Sharp fighting took place in each of South Vietnam's four military regions over the weekend amid signs that the Communists hope to keep the war going at a heightened pace over the next several weeks. The enemy's most damaging attacks were in the Que Son Valley south of Da Nang, where North Vietnamese forces drove government troops out of Fire Support Base Ross, an important strongpoint, and captured a nearby district town.

The attacks open up an important approach to the populated coastal districts south of Da Nang. Initial field reports suggest that the South Vietnamese forces may have had leadership problems; the local government commander is reported to have pulled his forces out against the orders of the regional commander, General Truong. Government troops are now regrouping and forming a new defense line.

To the north, there were no major new engagements in the Quang Tri City area, but the enemy's intense shelling of government forces continued, and additional North Vietnamese reinforcements have joined the battle. Prisoners indicate that elements of all three regiments of the 308th Division have taken up positions just south of the citadel.

In the region around Saigon battles flared near several key routes. Civilian traffic was held up temporarily by skirmishing along routes 1, 13, and 15 in an arc some 25 miles north and east of the capital. The bloodiest fight, however, took place about 20 miles south of Saigon near Route 4. This action, which cost government troops more than 80 casualties, could presage a major enemy attempt to interdict Route 4 and cut Saigon off from the vital rice growing delta region.

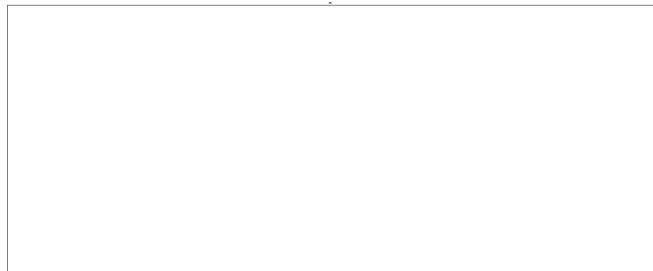
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Review of recent aerial photography of Haiphong harbor shows a shallow-draft Chinese minesweeper moored next to a Chinese merchantman that has been trapped in the harbor since the mining in April.

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CHINA - NORTH VIETNAM

Satellite photography [redacted] covering the Ping-hsiang area on the China - North Vietnam border showed a high level of logistics activity. The total car and locomotive count in the main rail yard--616--was about equal to the previous daily high during June and July, but the number of vehicles and large pieces of equipment--847--was more than double the previous high. These vehicles were sighted on rail cars and parked in open storage. Almost 350 of them were parked on roads west of the rail yard. In the main rail yard ten tank cars were visible on the spur leading to the petroleum storage facility, and seven tank cars were seen elsewhere in the yard. In one area of the yard, petroleum storage tanks apparently were being transferred to trucks.

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Equipment in the main yard and on an 11-mile stretch of rail line to the north totaled 1,600 vehicles and large pieces of equipment, including 12 tanks, 36 canvas-covered pieces of equipment--presumably armored personnel carriers--on flatcars, and 19 buses. Satellite photography [redacted] of last year showed fewer than 500 vehicles in the over-all Ping-hsiang area.

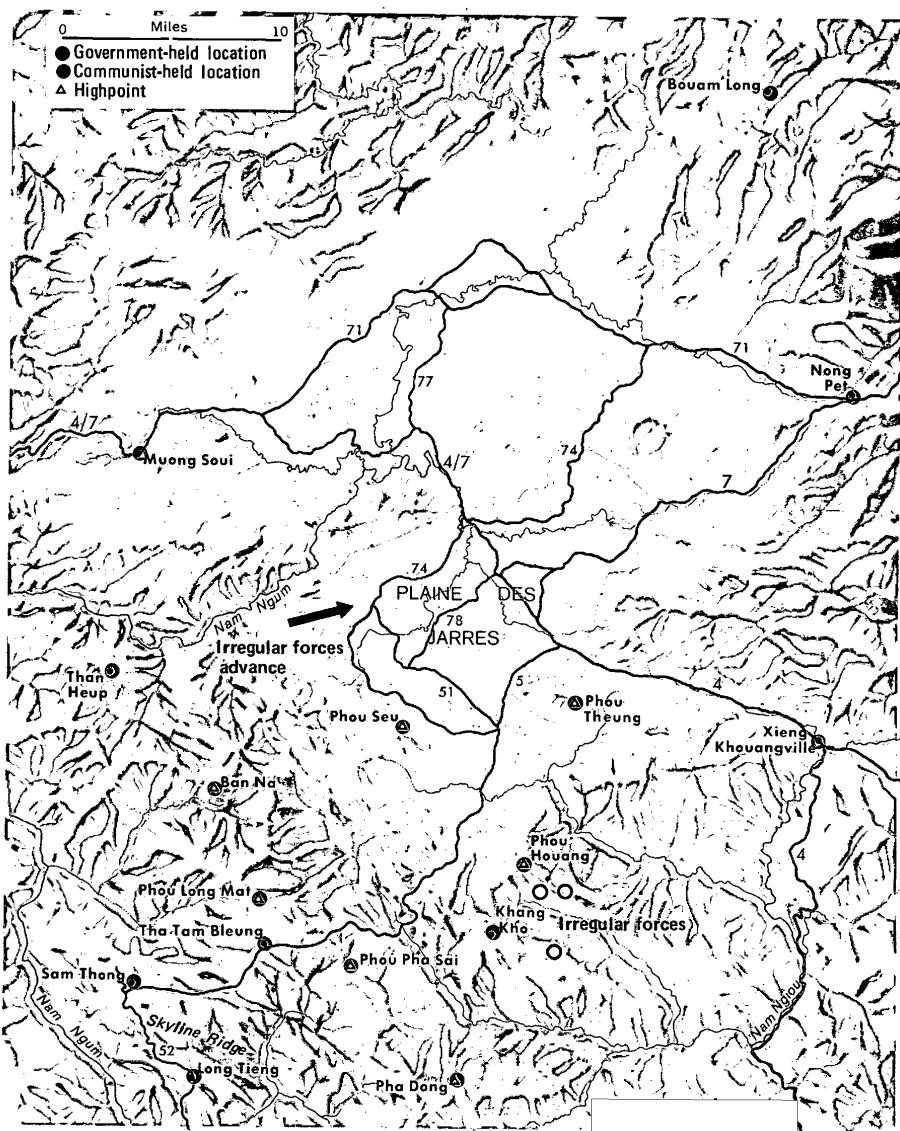
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Activity at Dong Dang on the North Vietnamese side of the border [redacted] was also high. Many trucks and truck convoys--some towing AAA and field artillery pieces--were seen on the roads in the vicinity of Dong Dang. The rail line between Dong Dang and Hanoi appeared to be open to through traffic all the way to Bac Giang. Freight cars were observed on sidings all along the rail line and at least one train was seen moving on the line.

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LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS

Vang Pao's forces are not encountering any major enemy resistance in their advance toward the Plaine des Jarres. Over the past few days, irregulars of three battalions have reported only light clashes with North Vietnamese troops in moving to the western edge of the Plaine. Elements of the other three battalions engaged in the offensive reported scattered contacts with the enemy in occupying Khang Kho and several other high ground positions in the vicinity of Phou Houang, near the Plaine's southern tip.

The government, meanwhile, has airlifted additional irregular forces--numbering about 900 men--from Long Tieng to Bouam Long, northeast of the Plaine. These forces are also slated to participate in operations in northern Laos.

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MOROCCO

King Hassan's address to the nation over the weekend is not likely to inspire confidence in his rule.

Besides announcing his plans to take control of the armed forces, he also warned that dissenters would not be tolerated.

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These statements may mean a repetition of the summary executions that followed last year's abortive coup. Such a course of action could buy some time for the King's authoritarian rule, but is also likely to lead to new efforts to remove him.

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NOTE

West Germany - East Germany: The Bahr-Kohl talks--now official negotiations--resumed last week in East Berlin. The East German side presented a new draft treaty on basic relations between the two countries that contains a reference to the German state's right of self-determination, a nod in Bonn's direction. Moreover, Kohl, in an apparent attempt to show some flexibility on another of Bonn's key concerns, suggested that West Germany could make some kind of unilateral declaration "regarding the question of the nation." There was, however, no give in Pankow's position on the crucial "human rights" issues such as freedom of travel and the reunification of families. These matters are particularly sensitive for the East Germans and they are likely to resist firmly Bonn's demands for concessions in this area.

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